

Talbot County Tourism Board

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, January 10, 2018

8:30 a.m.

101 Marlboro Avenue, Suite 53, Conference Room #1, Easton, MD 21601

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Judy Bixler called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

Board Members Present: Judy Bixler, John Booth, Angela Eade, Ian Fleming, Tracy Johns, Dolores Jones, Harold Klinger, Laura Price, Jeff Schneider, Ben Simons, Al Silverstein, and Cassandra Vanhooser

Board Members Absent: Kelley Cox, Kimberly Weller

Recording Secretary: Candace Harris

Visitors: Ryan Snow, Sam Shoge

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the November meeting were presented. Al Silverstein moved that the minutes be accepted as written. Tracy Johns seconded the motion, which passed by unanimous vote.

III. Old Business

2018 Year of Frederick Douglass: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the County Council has officially declared 2018 Year of Frederick Douglass. There are 40+ community organizations working on the Frederick Douglass 200 project, and events are scheduled for the entire year. The FD200.org website has been set up to list the events for the year and is being managed by Damika Baker from the Academy Art Museum. The Prayer Breakfast is the kickoff event and will be held at The Milestone on February 10, 2018.

Ms. Vanhooser also reported that ED&T has received a small grant to restructure the Frederick Douglass driving tour as a mobile-responsive website. The driving tours have been restructured so you can go to the birthplace, the Miles River Neck, St. Michaels and the Bay Hundred, and back to Easton for the Return of Douglass.

We are working with HubCity Mobile out of Hagerstown. Pricilla Morris is the researcher who is developing the content. We are also doing a small rack card to direct people to the website. Kenneth Morris Jr., Dale Green, and the Honor Society have been invited to vet this project. We are trying to have this finished by February 14, 2018.

Our office has been working for more than a year with our partners at the County level to try to get a park for Frederick Douglass. We are hoping to make an announcement about the park during Black History Month. The land for the park is located at 13213 Lewistown Road.

At Large Position: Ms. Vanhooser reported that the County Council voted to add the At Large Position. Cassandra will get with Harold to submit a letter of recommendation for the next Council Meeting.

PACE Legislation: PACE Legislation passed at the meeting last night. This is exciting for Talbot County's businesses, especially historic properties that need to have upgrades to their energy facilities. This allows you to take a long term loan and have the payment attached to your property tax assessment. Most projects are cash flow positive within a year. There is a \$25,000 minimum investment, and businesses have to have an energy audit to prove that the upgrades benefit the facility.

The department will offer training for local lenders on January 26, 2018. There are already lenders statewide who are participating in this program. We will be partnering with Maryland Clean Energy to do the training for our businesses.

Christmas Party: Judy Bixler thanked Cassandra Vanhooser and her team for the Christmas Party. Everyone really enjoyed themselves. Cassandra stated that we appreciated the three Council members who came to the party and noted that this was a great way to showcase Mason's. The industry is happy to have them back and open again.

IV. New Business

Tourism Impact Numbers: Ms. Vanhooser distributed the calendar year 2016 numbers from the Maryland Tourism Economic Impact Study. She reported that every county is required to participate in this or forfeit their qualification for grant funds. Each county spent \$1,236 for the study. The information comes directly from the tax codes directly impacted by tourism spending.

The numbers for 2016 are very positive. The report showed \$214 million in industry revenue and has continued to rise since 2010. Employment is up and tourism continues to be a driver for the economy here in Talbot County. Ms. Vanhooser did note that 2017 numbers are likely to be down, based on current sales and use tax numbers.

Sales and Use Tax Numbers for 2018. Talbot County is down more than 10%, which is primarily coming from lodging. Ms. Vanhooser said we expected these numbers to be low because Harbourtowne, Tilghman Island Inn, and Harrison's are currently closed. John Flannigan from California bought Harrison's and has plans to have the property open by April. Tilghman Island Inn does not have a new owner yet. Harbourtowne will not be open until spring of 2018 or 2019. Ms. Vanhooser reported that our grant will be down significantly this year, and she expects the trend will continue until these properties

return to the marketplace. She said there will be a grants meeting in January to discuss the future calculation of grant funds. Harold Klinger asked if we could inform the state of the plans that Harbortowne has to convince them that this is short term so they will not penalize us. Judy Bixler said no because the state will say when Harbortowne comes back online the numbers will jump. Ben Simon asked if we could look at the numbers that do not include Harbortowne, Tilghman Island Inn and Harrison to see how our numbers run. Cassandra said she would work on it with the finance department.

Merchants are saying that their sales are down this year. Cassandra said we will keep a close eye on it.

V. Hospitality Program:

Chesapeake College is reworking their HAT (Hospitality and Tourism) program. Dr. Rob Thompson is in charge of this program. Ms. Vanhooser has asked if they would come to speak to us directly about this program and so the Board would have an opportunity to give their input. This is the career path line up if you want a career in hospitality.

VI. Comments:

Tourism Day is February 16, 2018. Al Silverstein reported the County Council passed final legislation to move ahead on the annexation. Taste of Eastern Shore is February 8 at the Lowes Hotel. Al Silverstein is going to send information to Cassandra and she will send out to everyone.

VII. Town Reports

Representatives from each of the towns reported on news and events taking place in their jurisdictions.

VIII. Next Board Meeting

The next board meeting is scheduled on Wednesday, February 14, 2018.

X. Adjournment

Ms. Bixler thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. Al Silverstein motioned for adjournment and Harold Klinger seconded. The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:27 a.m.